



Aruba honors one of the island's icons of Traditional and Dande music

Very recently, and in keeping with the holiday season, a festive ceremony was held in the courtyard to honor one of the island's great musicians, Erigino Ras. Senora Bernadina Growell and Padu Lampe have earned the monikers of "The Mother and Father of Traditional Aruban Culture," and if this is the case, than Erigino Ras could certainly be dubbed "The Uncle of Traditional Aruban Culture." It was for his contributions as composer, guitarist, and a member of several musical groups, including "Los Trovadores Folklorico" for which he received recognition by not only Tino Ruiz, Director of the Department for Cultural Contribution, but also the Minister of Culture, the Honorable Ramon Lee.

Present for this moving tribute was his daughter and President of the Parliament, Mervyn Ras, his wife of many years, Clarita Ras-Bareño, and his sons, Cal and Felipe, who has taken a place in Los Trovadores, to replace his retired father. Father and son did join together to serenade the gathering with one of the old style songs for which the group is famous.

From a young age, Egigino was raised in a family surrounded by music. He had an old-fashioned upbringing, being one of eleven brothers and sisters. He began his musical career on one of the small Venezuelan guitars that are so popular here for children, called a "Cuarta Guitar." Before the age of thirteen he began composing, and his first song was titled "Dande I Sjon Feleci (Ban Ban di Soledad.)" Dande is the music of the New Year, where the singers stroll from home to home, playing their music and customizing the lyrics to sing of the members of each household. Arubans do not really consider their homes blessed for the new year until the Dande singers have paid a visit.

In 1952 Erigino Ras went to work at the Lago Refinery, but continued to play on the weekends along with his brother Bertrando as a member of the group called Trio Savaneta. When his brother died in 1953, he was so despondent left the group and when he married in 1954 he put his musical career aside in favor of focusing on his wife and children. Erigino's talent as a creative storyteller was not only enjoyed by his three children, but by his many nieces and nephews as well. Though not actively continuing his musical career, he did continue giving his family the traditional musical blessing at every New Year.

In the mid-sixties, Erigino returned to performing, at least on holidays, and in 1975 he joined the group Los Canarios upon retiring from his job at the Lago Refinery.

From that time, Erigino performed with a number of groups such as La Divercion, and composing for others like Grupo Inspiracion. Many of his songs were recorded on Long Play albums, cassettes and CD. Though he stopped composing in 2003, Erigino continues to play with the group Los Trovadores Folklorico, along with his son, Felipe, a noted performer in his own right.

The awards presentation at the Instituto di Cultura was rich with the traditions and music that give the Aruban people their own unique character. Master of ceremonies, Harry Croes, and director of the Dande Festival praised Erigino for his contributions towards keeping this art form alive, and the Minister presented him with a plaque of appreciation. It was very proud moment for Erigino and his family, and for the community that attended that evening.